

Axing anchors: It's not just Sue

By Post Staff Report

March 8, 2012 | 5:00am



Simmons: Seems like part of the family.

For many people, the sudden departure of a long-time news anchor is like losing a member of the family. A trusted voice, someone who came into their living rooms every night, is suddenly gone.

That's the impact when the likes of WNBC's Sue Simmons and Al Terzi of Connecticut's WFSB are suddenly off the air.

As The Post's Cindy Adams reported yesterday, Simmons' contract wasn't renewed by the NBC-owned station, forcing her off the air after more than 30 years. Terzi, the so-called "Dean of Connecticut News" stepped down late last month after failing to reach a new contract with his station. He'd been on the air in Connecticut for more than 40 years, 28 of them at Channel 3.

We don't know how WNBC will mark Simmons' departure; Terzi's last broadcast was filled with tributes from his co-workers, with staff members standing behind him on set as the show ended.

As a former local news producer, I'm all too familiar with scenes like this. Anchors and reporters come and go in TV; that's nothing new. But in these cases, colleagues are also wondering if (or when) the same thing will happen to them.

The TV news business is, after all, a business — and in an industry that's increasingly losing viewers. Instead of three stations to choose from, like in the “good old days,” there are now hundreds. And people can get all the information they need (even watch the TV reporters' stories) online at any time.

When cuts need to be made in this “new normal,” the top targets are the “old timers,” who inevitably draw the biggest paychecks. The sad truth is, while anchors like Simmons and Terzi command big salaries, they don't produce a lot of content for stations. Their main role is to be a trusted face people can turn to for the news.

For the same salary Simmons or Terzi earned for staying “in house” and anchoring an hour a night, their stations can probably pay two or three young reporters or producers who hit the streets and bring back stories for many different newscasts.

It's a harsh reminder to the remaining workers that they're ultimately at the mercy of accountants. For people at home, it's also a jarring reminder of their own job insecurity.

If a well-respected, trusted person they came to think of as a family friend could lose his or her job because he or she “cost too much,” what does it mean for *your* career? That it's so public a departure only reinforces the fear that no one is safe, as the economy drags along for another year.

The good news for fans of Sue Simmons and Al Terzi, however, is that you'll probably see them again. Simmons hasn't announced any post-WNBC plans yet, but Terzi says he's looking for new opportunities. Another station will probably pick them up, either full-time or part-time, and make a big deal out of their “return to your living room.”

A trusted voice and face is, after all, something money can buy.

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